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TAGS: PGOV PREL PHUM ZI MDC
SUBJECT: MDC UNHAPPINESS WITH SOUTH AFRICA GROWS

Classified By: political section chief Matt Harrington. Reasons: 1.5 (B) and (D).

Summary

11. (C) Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) President Morgan Tsvangirai told a visiting staffdel that Zimbabwe needed a 12-18 month transitional period during which critical national issues must be resolved to lay the foundation for a new election and long-term political stability. He predicted that the Mugabe regime would not be able to last another six months, given the country's dramatic economic decline, but MDC Secretary-General Welshman Ncube lamented that those in control in ZANU-PF are unwilling to engage in dialogue on the way forward, no matter how bad the economy gets. Ncube implied that the MDC would try to reverse the damage to commercial agriculture done by the fast track resettlement program, but said it was politically unviable to make such a promise publicly. Tsvangirai thought the international community had done an effective job of isolating the Mugabe regime, but he urged Kofi Annan and South African President Thabo Mbeki to become more engaged in the search for a solution. Ncube was strongly critical of South Africa, which he said was working actively to undermine the prospects for democracy in Zimbabwe. End Summary.

Transitional government the way forward?

12. (C) On December 11, members of the Flynn/Chaka staffdel, joined by the Ambassador and polchief, lunched with MDC President Morgan Tsvangirai, MDC Secretary-General Welshman Ncube, and party spokesman Paul Themba-Nyathi. The Ambassador asked Tsvangirai to elaborate on his recent public call for a 12-18 month transitional period leading to a new presidential election. That was not a new proposal, the MDC president replied, but was consistent with the party's position at the aborted talks with the ruling party brokered in April and May by Presidents Mbeki and Obasanjo. Tsvangirai said he had merely "reinforced" that suggestion in

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his recent public remarks. A transitional arrangement was needed, he said, as a "cooling-off" period before a new election was held, and critical national issues must be addressed during that period to lay the foundation for long-term political stability. Asked whether the MDC would accept President Mugabe in a prominent decision-making role during the proposed transitional period, Tsvangirai said no, his retirement was a precondition for the MDC to endorse such an approach. MDC Secretary-General Welshman Ncube was less dismissive, saying this would depend on how Mugabe's status was handled during a transitional period. For instance, Mugabe could keep his title as president, while most of his decision-making powers could be shifted to the transitional authority.

Economic decline an effective motivator?

13. (C) Asked whether he felt significant time pressure to forge a political solution, Tsvangirai said there is tremendous pressure on both sides. He predicted that Mugabe's regime would be unable to last another six months. How can a Government function, he asked, with no foreign exchange, with a worthless currency, and with an inflation rate predicted to rise soon to 500 percent? The Ambassador noted that senior ZANU-PF insiders had made the same 6-month prediction to him of the GOZ's demise, if the country continues on the same path. The main pressure on the current Government, Tsvangirai asserted, would be exerted by the dramatic economic decline, a factor which might make the ruling party more inclined to negotiate. Ncube was not optimistic, declaring that those with influence in ZANU-PF are hardliners who are convinced they can run the country "through propaganda." Those in control, he said, are simply not interested in dialogue. He warned that the ruling party's infamous "retribution machine" has kept ZANU-PF

moderates toeing the party line. ZANU-PF MP's often agree in private with their colleagues across the aisle, but they are not willing to express that agreement in public because they are afraid of what their own party might do to them.

Restoring the rule of law

14. (C) Staffdel member Malik Chaka asked whether extra-legal forces such as the youth militia and war veterans pose a major obstacle to a restoration of stability. Once the Government of Zimbabwe withdraws support from such groups, Ncube replied, they will become irrelevant, and disbanding them would be one of the top priorities of a transitional authority. According to Tsvangirai, any transitional authority also must be able to resolve two delicate issues relating to the military; how to deal with all the land allocated to members of the military under the fast track program, and how to handle the fact that many security service members have committed atrocities.

Land

15. (C) Asked whether an MDC government would be able to restore commercial agriculture, Tsvangirai replied that the first step would be to carry out a comprehensive audit of the former commercial farming sector. Armed with that information, the MDC would move to restore property rights and the right to buy and sell land. The Ambassador pointed out that, whether one liked it or not, there is a new reality on commercial farms. Did the MDC plan to formulate a new policy on land which took into account this new reality? Ncube insisted that, in every nation that has ever carried out radical land reform -- citing the USSR and Mozambique -- that reform has slowly been reversed over time. It is not politically viable for the MDC to say that it would reverse what has been done under the fast track resettlement program but, realistically, any future government will have to find a way to restore commercial agriculture. What has happened in Zimbabwe, Ncube said, is that all the property acquired has simply been transferred from private ownership to government ownership, so government has complete control over what happens to that land. MDC spokesman Themba-Nyathi remarked that an additional challenge for a future government would be to change people's psychology away from land and toward poverty eradication. Tsvangirai agreed, saying people were more interested in jobs than land, and that no country has ever developed by removing people from industry and sending them to rural areas to farm.

Role of International Community

16. (C) Tsvangirai said he thought the international community had played an effective role in increasing pressure on the Mugabe regime, by not recognizing the legitimacy of the March 2002 election. He expressed concern, however, that the EU regularly makes exceptions to the travel ban imposed on certain GOZ officials. He expressed hope that Kofi Annan would play a more active role in focusing attention on Zimbabwe's humanitarian crisis and that African countries -- South Africa in particular -- would engage more actively in the search for a solution here. Welshman Ncube was much more critical of the South African government, which he accused of working actively to undermine the prospects for democracy in Zimbabwe. He had particularly harsh words for South African Foreign Minister Zuma, whom he claimed had been in Europe the previous week lobbying the European Union not to renew its targeted sanctions against Zimbabwean officials in February 2003. Themba-Nyathi expressed concern that such lobbying by Pretoria might be having an effect, reporting that the Portuguese ambassador in Harare had recently "dressed down" two senior MDC legislators when the latter suggested that President Mugabe should be excluded from next year's EU-African Union summit in Lisbon.

17. (C) Asked to describe the MDC's relations with the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), Tsvangirai said COSATU is facing tremendous pressure from the ANC, which accuses it of being ultra-leftist, "whatever that means." The MDC, its leader said, has tried to avoid direct contact with the ANC and those in coalition with it, and is focusing more on working to strengthen linkages with South African churches and civic organizations.

Comment

18. (C) As usual, Tsvangirai portrayed himself as a conciliator committed to achieving change through peaceful, democratic means. At the same time, his recent public remarks have become much tougher, stating explicitly that the MDC can no longer restrain Zimbabweans from expressing their anger and frustration and pledging the party's support of "all peaceful means" to achieve change. In one public

speech, he criticized party supporters for being afraid of the GOZ's security forces -- telling them to "vomit up their fear" -- and for waiting for him to tell them what to do. Zimbabwe's economic decline in the last three weeks alone has been dramatic -- with the fuel shortage becoming critical and many essential commodities simply disappearing from the shelves -- and raises increasing concerns of civil unrest that could quickly spiral out of control.

19. (C) Welshman Ncube has in the past criticized what he has viewed as South Africa's duplicitous efforts on Zimbabwe, but this is the most vehement criticism we have heard from him. We would be interested in learning whether FM Zuma has indeed been pressing the EU to drop its targeted sanctions against Zimbabwean officials, and, if so, why.

SULLIVAN